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cont. beam deflecting means that effects a controlled deflection of the laser beam in two mutually perpendicular directions, said beam deflection means being arranged intermediate the beam generating means and the beam focusing means,

wherein said laser unit is operable to provide laser engraved markings at exact locations on said surface when said strip intermittently is in an immobilized condition before being fed into a processing apparatus, which mechanically shapes the thus-marked strip into marked articles to be included in cans.

23. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 22, further comprising beam expansion means that increases a diameter of the laser beam emitted from the beam generating means, said beam expansion means being arranged intermediate the beam generating means and the beam deflecting means.

24. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 22, wherein said laser unit is operable to provide about 1-5  $\mu\text{m}$  deep engravings in said surface of said strip.

25. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 22, wherein the beam generating means outputs laser radiation in the near IR wavelength range.

26. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 22, wherein the beam generating means outputs laser radiation in a sequence of pulses.

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cont. 27. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 22, further comprising a control unit having a memory means that receives and stores a pattern to be engraved on said surface, and a processor means that operates said laser unit to produce said pattern on said surface of said strip.

28. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 27, wherein said processor means is adapted to conjointly control said beam generating means and said beam deflecting means such that at least one pulse of laser radiation outputted by the beam generating means forms visible pits in said surface, and such that a number of said pits is formed in said surface to reproduce said pattern.

29. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 28, wherein said processor means controls the time period between subsequent pulses such that each pulse has sufficient energy to generate one of said pits.

30. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 28, wherein said processor means is adapted to, based on said pattern in said memory means, calculate the positions of all of said pits on said surface before operating said laser unit to produce said pattern.

31. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 27, wherein said pattern comprises a number of characters.

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32. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 31, wherein said processor means controls the beam deflecting means such that said characters are provided sequentially one after another on said surface.

33. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 22, wherein the beam generating means comprises a Nd:YAG laser.

34. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 22, wherein the beam generating means comprises a diode laser pumped Nd:YAG laser.

35. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 22, wherein the beam generating means comprises a laser cavity and a mode selection element.

36. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 35, wherein the mode selection element is arranged in said laser cavity for obtaining suitable laser mode characteristics.

37. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 36, wherein the laser mode characteristic is TEM<sub>00</sub>.

38. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 35, wherein said mode selection element defines an aperture of variable diameter that is arranged to selectively transmit a portion of the laser beam.

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cont. 39. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 22, wherein the beam focusing means comprises a flat-field lens having an effective focal length of about 120-190 mm.

40. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 39, wherein the effective focal length is about 150-180 mm.

41. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 22, wherein said laser unit is arranged in the immediate vicinity of, but is physically unconnected to, said processing apparatus.

42. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 22, wherein said laser unit is disconnectible to allow for manufacture of articles without marking of the strip.

43. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 22, wherein said marked articles are opening tabs to be attached to ends for cans.

44. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 43, wherein said laser unit is operable to provide the laser engraved markings on said surface of said strip such that each of said marked tabs have said markings on a tab surface between an opening in said tab and bent edge portions of the tab.

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cont. 45. (New) An arrangement for shaping and marking a continuous strip of metal, said arrangement comprising:

a processing apparatus that mechanically shapes said strip into articles to be included in cans;

a feeding means that intermittently feeds said strip through said processing apparatus; and

a laser unit that provides markings on a surface of said strip, said laser unit including:

beam generating means for generating a beam of laser radiation;

beam focusing means for focusing the laser beam onto said surface of said strip;

and

beam deflecting means that effects a controlled deflection of the laser beam in two mutually perpendicular directions, said beam deflection means being arranged intermediate the beam generating means and the beam focusing means,

wherein said laser unit is operable to provide laser engraved markings at exact locations on said surface when said strip intermittently is in an immobilized condition before being fed into said processing apparatus.

46. (New) A laser unit providing markings on a surface of a continuous strip of metal, said laser unit comprising:

a beam generator configured to generate a beam of laser radiation;

a beam focuser, associated with the beam generator, that focuses the beam onto said surface of said strip; and

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conc. a beam deflector, associated with the beam focuser, that effects a controlled deflection of the beam in two mutually perpendicular directions, said beam deflector being arranged intermediate the beam generator and the beam focuser,

wherein said laser unit is operable to provide laser engraved markings at exact locations on said surface when said strip intermittently is in an immobilized condition before being fed into a processing apparatus, which mechanically shapes the thus-marked strip into marked articles to be included in cans.

47. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 46, further comprising a beam expander, associated with the beam generator, that increases a diameter of the beam emitted from the beam generator, said beam expander being arranged intermediate the beam generator and the beam deflector.

48. (New) A laser unit as set forth in claim 46, further comprising a control unit having a memory that receives and stores a pattern to be engraved on said surface, and a processor that operates said laser unit to produce said pattern on said surface of said strip.

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**IN THE ABSTRACT:**

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